Umm 'Ajra

Umm 'Ajra – Depopulated Palestinian Village of the Baysan District

Umm 'Ajra was a depopulated Palestinian village in the Baysan District. It stood on generally level ground approximately 4 kilometers south of Baysan, sloping gradually eastward toward the Jordan Valley. Its average elevation was about 225 meters below sea level.

The village was distinguished by its numerous springs, fertile agricultural land, and a settlement pattern combining permanent houses with tents clustered around water sources and scattered among the surrounding fields.

The precise date of its depopulation in 1948 remains problematic in the Palestinian sources reviewed. Several sources index 31 May 1948, while others give 1 May. Walid Khalidi's PalQuest entry does not provide a village-specific military narrative capable of resolving the discrepancy. This article therefore states that Umm 'Ajra was depopulated during May 1948 amid the collapse of the Baysan Valley, while preserving the disagreement over the exact date.

Location and Geography

Umm 'Ajra stood in the southern part of the Baysan plain approximately 4 kilometers south of Baysan, slightly east of due south.

The village occupied generally flat terrain that descended gradually eastward and overlooked a large portion of the Jordan Valley from all directions except the west.

Its average elevation was approximately 225 meters below sea level.

A secondary road connected Umm 'Ajra with the main route to Baysan, while other secondary roads and dirt tracks linked it with neighboring rural communities.

Supporting Palestinian documentation places al-Ghazzawiyya to the north, Baysan to the northwest, Farwana to the west, 'Arab al-'Arida to the south, and Masil al-Jizl, associated with 'Arab al-Zinati, to the east.

Name

The principal Palestinian sources reviewed do not provide a sufficiently documented historical or linguistic explanation for the name Umm 'Ajra.

No specific personal, tribal, or geographical derivation is therefore presented as established fact without stronger historical evidence.

Built Environment

Umm 'Ajra's settlement pattern consisted of both permanent houses and tents.

Most dwellings were clustered near the village's western edge around its springs.

Other houses and tents were scattered across agricultural land east of the principal settlement area.

This pattern reflected the close relationship between the inhabitants, their cultivated fields, water resources, and lingering rural and semi-pastoral forms of settlement.

Population and Houses

The inhabitants of Umm 'Ajra were Muslims.

Year	Population	Note
1922	86	Official Census of Palestine: 41 males and 45 females, all Muslims
1931	242	Official census; all inhabitants were Muslims
1945	260	Official statistics; all inhabitants were Palestinian Arab Muslims
1948	About 300–302	Later demographic estimates, not an official Mandate census
1998	About 1,852 refugees and descendants	Later estimate published by Palestine Remembered

The official 1931 census recorded 48 houses in Umm 'Ajra.

The estimate of approximately 59 houses for 1948 is a later calculation rather than an official Government of Palestine census figure.

Services and Education

Umm 'Ajra was not a major service center. Its inhabitants relied on nearby Baysan for a range of daily services and supplies.

Baysan's markets also provided the principal outlet for the village's agricultural and livestock products.

Walid Khalidi and PalQuest do not provide clear village-specific documentation of an independent formal school or specifically identified mosque in Umm 'Ajra. Neither is therefore added without stronger evidence.

Water Resources

Springs were central to the settlement pattern and economy of Umm 'Ajra. Most houses and tents clustered around water sources in the western part of the village.

Supporting Palestinian documentation identifies 'Ayn Nasr, west of the village, as one of the principal springs and also records springs within the main residential area.

Additional springs were associated with the vicinity of Khirbat Hajj Makka and Khirbat Sursuq.

The water was used for domestic purposes and for irrigating date palms, vegetables, and other crops.

Economic Life and Agriculture

The economy of Umm 'Ajra depended on agriculture and livestock raising, benefiting from the fertility of the Baysan Valley and the availability of water.

Cereals were the principal crop. Palestinian documentation also records vegetables, date palms, bananas, and other fruit crops in the area.

Some land, particularly near the foot of the western edge of the valley, was used

for grazing.

Baysan served as the principal market for the village's agricultural and livestock products.

Land Ownership, 1944/45

The official total land area of Umm 'Ajra was 6,443 dunams.

Total	6,443
Official Ownership Category	**Area in Dunams**
Arab	2,708
Jewish	1,218
Public	2,517

The figures balance exactly: 2,708 + 1,218 + 2,517 = 6,443 dunams.

Some later Palestinian sources display a total of 6,643 dunams, but this does not reconcile with the official ownership table. The official total of 6,443 dunams is therefore used here.

Palestine Remembered presents the same ownership figures using its simplified terminology: 2,708 dunams “Palestinian,” 1,218 dunams “Transferred to Zionists,” and 2,517 dunams “Communal/Public.”

The phrase “Transferred to Zionists” should be preserved when reproducing that source's terminology rather than automatically replacing it with the official “Jewish” category.

Land Use, 1944/45

Grand Total	2,708	1,218	2,517	6,443
Land Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Cereals	2,688	1,218	2,334	6,240

Grand Total	2,708	1,218	2,517	6,443
Land Use	**Arab**	**Jewish**	**Public**	**Total**
Total cultivable/cultivated land	2,688	1,218	2,334	6,240
Non-cultivable land	20	0	183	203

The official table balances exactly: 6,240 dunams of cultivable or cultivated land plus 203 dunams of non-cultivable land equal the total village area of 6,443 dunams.

PalQuest's displayed official table does not provide a separate built-up acreage, so no unsupported built-up figure is added.

Palestine Remembered's simplified land-use display requires careful interpretation. It lists 5,022 cereal dunams as “Palestinian,” but the official table shows that this combines 2,688 Arab dunams with 2,334 Public dunams.

Likewise, its 203-dunam non-arable figure combines 20 Arab dunams and 183 Public dunams. Public land is therefore kept separate in the table above.

Pre-Nakba Land Dispute near Baysan

The Baysan area witnessed a serious land dispute during the Mandate period.

In connection with land near Baysan that had been proposed for transfer to the Jewish National Fund, Zionist settlers took possession of approximately 3,000 dunams by occupying and developing portions of the area.

In response, villagers from Umm 'Ajra cultivated approximately 600 dunams and asserted a claim to them, although the available account states that they did not possess title deeds establishing formal ownership.

The dispute remained unresolved as of May 1947.

The 600 dunams mentioned in this dispute are not added to Umm 'Ajra's official 6,443-dunam total because the source treats them as disputed land near Baysan

rather than as an additional registered village-land category.

Archaeological Sites

Several archaeological mounds and khirbas stood on Umm 'Ajra's lands.

Walid Khalidi specifically identifies:

- Tall al-Shaykh al-Simad, a double mound.
- Khirbat Hajj Makka.
- Khirbat Sursuq.

The principal source does not provide sufficient archaeological dating to assign all of these sites securely to a specific historical period.

Operation Gideon

The Golani Brigade carried out Operation Gideon in the Baysan Valley between 10 and 15 May 1948.

The operation aimed to capture Baysan and expel the Palestinian inhabitants of the valley and surrounding communities.

PalQuest notes only that Irgun participation in the wider operation is possible, based on an Irgun announcement on 14 May claiming the capture of five Arab villages in the north. This does not establish an Irgun attack on Umm 'Ajra itself.

When Was Umm 'Ajra Occupied?

The exact date on which Umm 'Ajra was occupied and depopulated is not securely resolved by the Palestinian sources reviewed.

Palestine Remembered indexes **31 May 1948**, and the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia also displays 31 May in its page header.

However, the same Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia states elsewhere on the page

that the village was occupied on **1 May 1948**, a date also used by Falastinuna.

Walid Khalidi's PalQuest entry for Umm 'Ajra does not provide a detailed military narrative capable of resolving the contradiction.

The chronological problem is significant because Operation Gideon itself lasted only from 10 to 15 May: 1 May precedes the operation, while 31 May falls more than two weeks after it ended.

It is therefore inaccurate to state without qualification that Umm 'Ajra was captured on 31 May “during Operation Gideon.”

The safest reconstruction is that **Umm 'Ajra was depopulated during May 1948 amid the collapse of the Baysan Valley; several Palestinian sources index 31 May, while another tradition gives 1 May, and the principal village source does not establish the precise final date.**

Military Unit

Palestine Remembered associates Umm 'Ajra with the **Golani Brigade** and Operation Gideon.

Because the occupation date is disputed and Khalidi's village entry contains no detailed village-specific military account, a particular battalion or village-level attacking unit cannot be assigned with confidence.

The Golani Brigade unquestionably carried out the broader Operation Gideon campaign in the Baysan Valley, so Umm 'Ajra may safely be placed in the broader context of Golani's military conquest of the area, while preserving the village-level attribution caveat.

Irgun should not be listed as a confirmed attacking unit at Umm 'Ajra, since PalQuest describes its participation in Operation Gideon generally as only possible.

Occupation Chronology

Stage	Date	Details
Early occupation date in some sources	1 May 1948	Used by Falastinuna and repeated in part of the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia, but it predates Operation Gideon and is not confirmed by Khalidi's village entry.
Beginning of Operation Gideon	10 May 1948	The Golani Brigade launched its campaign to conquer the Baysan Valley and displace its Palestinian inhabitants.
Capture of Baysan and surrounding communities	10–15 May 1948	Numerous Palestinian communities in the valley collapsed or were depopulated during the operation.
Official end of Operation Gideon	15 May 1948	PalQuest's formal end date for the operation.
Depopulation date indexed by several sources	31 May 1948	Used by Palestine Remembered and in the header of the Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia, but it falls after Operation Gideon's official end and should not be described as part of the operation without qualification.
Destruction of the village	After depopulation; exact date not documented	The village dwellings were removed and the land was subsequently converted to cultivated fields.

Israeli Settlements on Village Lands

The farm of **Shif'a** stands on the lands of Umm 'Ajra.

According to Walid Khalidi and PalQuest, Shif'a was built in the **1950s**, rather than in 1948 as claimed by some later secondary sources.

Three other Israeli settlements were established near the village but not on Umm 'Ajra's lands:

- Avuqa, established in 1941, to the north.
- 'En ha-Natziv, established in 1946, near the western side of the site.
- Kefar Ruppin, established in 1938, near the eastern side.

These three neighboring settlements should therefore not be listed as settlements established on Umm 'Ajra village land.

Umm 'Ajra Today

According to the field description published in Walid Khalidi's *All That Remains*, the village site and surrounding lands had become cultivated fields.

Remnants of date palm trees remained scattered across the northern part of the site.

PalQuest includes a general field photograph of the village lands taken by Hasan Hawari in May 1990.

This description should not be treated as a comprehensive field verification of conditions in 2026. Fieldwork for *All That Remains* was conducted between 1987 and 1990 and therefore documents the state of the site during that survey period.

Sources

- PalQuest – Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question: Umm 'Ajra
- PalQuest – Operation Gideon
- PalQuest – Ma'lul; for the pre-Nakba land dispute involving villagers from Umm 'Ajra
- Palestine Remembered – Umm 'Ajra, Baysan District
- Palestine Remembered – Biladuna Filastin: Umm 'Ajra
- Palestinian Villages Encyclopedia – Umm 'Ajra; used comparatively for the conflicting occupation dates
- Falastinuna – Umm 'Ajra; supporting Palestinian documentation on

water, boundaries, and the 1 May chronology

- Government of Palestine – Census of Palestine 1922: Umm 'Ajra, 86 inhabitants
- Institute for Palestine Studies – Walid Khalidi, All That Remains
- PalQuest – All That Remains: Methodology